

The Comanches

One end

484 of a tipi pole was tied on each side of a horse or a mule and the other
492 end allowed to drag. This formed the travois on which the family
belongings were piled until it was hardly possible to see the back of
the animal bearing the burden. Children too large to be carried on
their mothers' backs but too small to ride alone were tied on some old
horse to be led or herded along with the procession. As an improvised
[758] ambulance for the wounded or ill, a buffalo skin was stretched be-
tween the poles of the travois, forming a sort of bed upon which the
invalid was fastened for the journey. It frequently happened that
some of the pack animals became frightened and scattered their bur-
dens for miles over the prairie. Men and boys divided their time along
the route between hunting and driving the remuda as they moved
across a land they claimed as their own—Comanchería.

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Peyote lost its power at the same time and in much the same way. The old men believed in Peyote exclusively. The younger generation could always go to a hospital or a doctor. This watering down of faith by having alternative choices plus that period of disbelief has been enough to change Peyote considerably.

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If there has been a considerable change in the nature of Peyote itself then one must ask questions concerning its present functions as compared with those of the past. Traditionally Peyote has been considered as performing two major functions, one is to continue traditional values, the other to make communal what was once individual and so to unite the members and thus enable them to cope with the threatening environment. Mooney saw the religion as regenerative, Slotkin believes it to be adaptive. Among the Comanches the picture seems to lie midway between the two with some evidence that major changes are in the offing.

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The Comanche Peyotist has inherited his religion directly from its founders. It is not an import to him and he does not feel bound by what other tribes have devised in recent years, the ethical points are not emphasized by the Comanche. As a result the findings that I will have must differ to some extent from those of Slotkin who has worked primarily in the Midwest and almost exclusively with the national organization. In spite of these differences there is a remarkable agreement on major points.

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The rapid growth of the religion between 1870 and 1920 both within the Comanche tribe as well as intertribally was, for individual Comanches, a regenerative experience. The fight for religious freedom, and the reinjection of values to a disintegrating group provided the strength for many men, now middle aged, to surmount the difficulties of their lives and to achieve a modicum of financial stability and success. It served to make Peyotists proud of their heritage and to

THE BONE-SETTER

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It was the middle of the afternoon before I could saddle my horse and leave for the Martny camp. Jim's family allotments, about six miles down Cache Creek, were the last individual Indian land. When the creek left his land it entered the Big Pasture Reserve, the ranch country. His allotments adjoined the reserve on both their south and east sides. There were two roads into Jim's camp, and both dead-ended. One, the road I used to reach the camp, came from the west and north; the other ran north from the camp to a gate into the reserve. The latter road was the one Jim used when going directly to Lawton or to the subagency at Fort Sill. A concept of the camp's isolation will help the reader to have a clearer understanding of subsequent events. As I have said, the evidence is mostly circumstantial.

I found Albert conscious, lying on his platform bed under the family's large brush arbor. As I remember it, their arbor was the largest family arbor I saw during the time I was in the Comanche country, probably thirty by thirty-six feet. It had a clearance of a full six feet at the edge or eaves and probably eight feet at the center. It was large enough for platform beds for all, besides a sizable living space. I saw larger arbors constructed for camp meetings, but not for family use.

Albert's mother left us boys to our talk, and I took over the job of switching the flies away with a leafy twig. Of course Albert knew nothing of the happenings, after the first few jumps made by the excited horse, until he regained consciousness, completely trussed up in splints. Beyond question, he was the worst broken-up human, to be living, I ever saw.

His right arm and leg, splinted, were lying in troughs made from pieces of wood from goods boxes. At that time all canned goods and food sold in cartons, like oatmeal and crackers, were shipped in wooden boxes. I imagine the Martny wives had saved the pieces to start the campfire.

The breaks in this arm and leg were compound fractures. That is to say, one or both bones from each break protruded from the flesh. The breaks in the left arm and leg, which were simple fractures, were held in place with splints from the same material, but were not in troughs. The splints were wrapped and padded with faded calico rags.

Here and there on the limbs and along the side of the body pieces of flesh were gouged out where the horse had stepped on the flesh. His racing shoes must have been new, for they made clean cuts.

164 Albert's scalp was torn loose from just above the hairline on his neck to about the crown of his head. This had been stitched back in place with stitches about three quarters of an inch apart. Along the stitches, and on all the wounds that were uncovered, a white powder had been sprinkled. I assumed that this was powdered calomel, as it was supposed to be the best repellent for screwworm flies.

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[75] Albert's body was exposed to the warm, dry air, aside from his breech-cloth or G-string. This is traditional covering for a Comanche boy's private parts, front and back, from the time he reaches puberty and throughout his life.

124 From this point, aside from a meager statement made by Big Jim, we are wholly dependent on circumstances for our reconstruction of what happened. Albert, Earny, and neighboring Indians contributed nothing to the overall information. Of course, no one wasted time trying to learn anything from the women. But the circumstances confront us with a succession of phenomena, or miracles, whichever you choose to call them.

177 The white doctor was barely gone when an itinerant cowboy rode into camp and asked for food. Hearing the women wailing, he learned of Albert's accident and offered to set the broken bones. He washed and cleansed the wounds and protruding bones with yellow laundry soap such as the women used when they washed clothes in West Cache Creek. (I can testify about the soap. We sold many, many cases of it over a period of years. Its trade name was Lenox, but I don't remember who manufactured it. It was carried by all jobbers and was the cheapest laundry soap on the market. We sold it at a nickel a bar, six bars for a quarter.)

000 Should Big Jim's soap story sound far-fetched, let me introduce some corroborating testimony. Jim Carter, who for many years was both a member of the Oklahoma City police force and my personal friend, told me this story. When he was around nineteen, he was a line rider for a ranch out from Olton, Texas, in the Panhandle. Along with a lad two or three years older, he lived in a line shack about fifteen miles from ranch headquarters.

One noonday, after they had eaten, Jim started to mount his horse for his afternoon chore. The horse started bucking before Jim was in the saddle. Somehow his weight came down on his left leg extended across the saddle seat, and the bone in the upper leg snapped, about halfway between the knee and the hip. Of course, Jim fell to the

000 Dr. McLain added little to the meager supply of facts. I believe he went out only two times. The wounds were all completely scabbed over, with so sign of infection, and he told the Indians he wouldn't be needed. He left them a supply of powdered calomel, with instructions to use it freely to repel screwworm flies. This was something the [136] Indians savvied, guarding against the screwworm fly. It had been their enemy for countless generations.

758 We mustn't neglect to give Albert's healthy body, and his ancestors, credit for his ready healing, the quick, strong knitting of his bones—plus the stoicism with which he lay there through the long hot summer, letting nature take her course. (I took occasion, once, to congratulate a surgeon on the job he had done on my son's broken wrist. He replied that much of a surgeon's success depended on the patient. "Your son got a good wrist and arm because when I told him not to use it, he obeyed. Then when I told him to use it, though it hurt, he used it.")

758 Albert remained out of school when fall came, and about Thanksgiving time he made his first trip to town horseback. I had been working out in the tent wareroom. Finishing my task, I returned to the storeroom and found Mother talking to Albert. Jim was standing there, face abeam, as Mother told Albert how well he looked.

His hair was long enough to cover the scalp scars, and his clothes covered the other marks of his accident. There was not a scar on face or hands. He was using all four of his limbs. His right leg was shorter, apparently, than the left, but for some time he limped on both legs.

000 By this time, much of the resentment over Jim's story had subsided. Most people took the story at Jim's value. Besides, they had things of greater interest with which to occupy themselves. But the overcurious, and those who had a "thing" about Indians in general, tried to create a feeling against the Indian family and against the cowboy Bone-setter who had saved the unfortunate boy's life.

177 Some people who didn't draw claims, and some who did, resented the Comanches' having all the good bottomland along West Cache, the water, and the timber. I think it would have helped if the government had called the land the Indians kept reserved land, instead 657 of allotments. This would have accented the fact that all the land had 423 belonged to the Indians and that they had sold only such land to the 177 government as they, the Indians, didn't wish to keep. The faultfinders